

Loop 202 costs soar past \$1B

By Doug Murphy
Staff Writer

The estimated cost of building the South Mountain Freeway Loop 202 has easily exceeded the amount of money tentatively earmarked when Maricopa County voters approved extending a quarter-cent sales tax in 2004.

The Loop 202 portion of Proposition 400 was estimated to cost \$1.1 billion.

But construction costs alone range from \$998 million to \$1.3 billion, and that doesn't take into account purchasing land and between 375 and 1,035 homes depending on the route.

On top of that, engineers looking at possible freeway routes are also studying the possibility of tunneling through ridges in South Mountain that are culturally significant to the Gila River Indian Community, as well as building a giant bridge to go over the ridges.

"I can't fathom the costs of that," said Laura Pendergast, a member of the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team selected by the Arizona Department of Transportation to help advise on a new, updated freeway route.

What looks like a Cadillac freeway on a Volkswagen budget bothers several members of the advisory team.

"They say don't worry about the more Loop, see page 4

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costs at this point, but I want to know what the costs are so I know if something is possible or not," said Rock Argabright, an Ahwatukee Foothills real estate agent and member of the advisory team.

According to Matt Burdick, a spokesman for ADOT, funding could become a problem later in the freeway planning process.

"It's one of the things we have to look at in the study, and it is one of the factors that will be considered from a policy standpoint," Burdick said.

Ultimately the Maricopa Association of Governments, which coordinated all transportation projects for the Valley's cities, will have to decide if spending more on the Loop 202 than projected is worth taking funding from other projects, Burdick said.

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**Rock
Argabright**

In 1988, Maricopa County voters approved a quarter-cent sales tax that included the Loop 202 being built along where Pecos Road now is. But an economic slowdown reduced the amount of money available and in the early 1990s the South Mountain Freeway Loop 202 became an unfunded freeway that was still shown on planning maps.

The cost of land and homes in the freeway's right-of-way is being studied by consultants hired by ADOT and could be available as early as this week
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